

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



New Farm Prompts Expert Conservationist to Seek Help from the Experts

Larry Cuddeback is a long-time farmer and an award-winning conservationist that just bought a second farm. Trained in forestry and a former park ranger for the Army Corps of Engineers, the Washington County farmer knows a lot about conservation practices and land management. And he knows where to get help with solving natural resource concerns.

Cuddeback turned to the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to ensure he used the best possible practices to meet production and environmental goals he's developing for this second farm.

The new 105-acre Cuddeback farm features diverse soils and some steep terrains. Past land use choices resulted in clearly evident soil losses.

"Larry wants to keep soil in place, improve water quality and wildlife habitat, and properly manage his trees," said Tony Maxwell, NRCS district conservationist in Washington County. "Working with Larry and our partner agencies, we are developing a conservation plan for this new farm that includes bird habitat improvement with the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), timber stand improvement with IDNR's Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program and permanent pasture. It will be tailored to do what Larry needs it to do."



Larry Cuddeback

For the forest, Maxwell requested technical assistance from Ray Lehn, one of 16 IDNR district foresters. Lehn toured the new Cuddeback farm and found an unhealthy forest. Because it was previously heavily grazed by cattle, there are no small trees and many multiflora rose plants on its steep slopes.

One of Lehn's recommendations is conducting a prescribed burn in the forest. According to Lehn, a properly timed and managed burn will kill the invasive plants and encourage the growth of desirable trees while not harming the adult trees.

Cuddeback is working with Maxwell on a plan for his new farm's cropland as well. "Because of the steep slope on some of the old cropland, we are looking at turning it

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into CRP buffers that can also be used for quail habitat,” said Maxwell. “That will help keep soil in place, clean the storm water runoff from his fields, and give him income.”

The 57-year-old Cuddeback’s original operation is a multifaceted 366-acre farm. Cuddeback and his wife, Kathy, grow hay, pasture, timber, row crops and have their land enrolled in the CRP. They also sell Christmas trees, wreaths and dried flower arrangements.

A 2004 Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation Hagie Award winner, Cuddeback is well known for protecting natural resources. “I tailor the crop to the soil,” Cuddeback said. “We have to protect the land. Part of land management includes the balance of preservation, conservation, resource development and stewardship. Overweighing everything is the fact that we still must make money doing it. That can be tough.”

Cuddeback adds, “Government programs help the land—the non-farmer and farmer alike.”

Maxwell is anxious to work with Cuddeback on his new farm. “I see this as a great opportunity to show a ‘before and after’ op-



NRCS District Conservationist Tony Maxwell and farmer Larry Cuddeback look at a thorny problem infesting his newly purchased land: multiflora rose. Eliminating the undesirable invasive species is one of the concerns that will be addressed in a resource management plan Maxwell is developing for Cuddeback.

eration,” said Maxwell. “Larry and I will develop a long-term conservation plan for his new farm that will likely use REAP, CRP, grassed waterways, terraces and native prairies. I’m excited because I know we will see progress made every four to six months. This will be a great ongoing conservation project. Larry is leading by example.”

For free technical help with the resource concerns on your farm or ranch, contact your local NRCS office.

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*By Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist
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NRCS District Conservationist Tony Maxwell, farmer Larry Cuddeback, and IDNR Forester Ray Lehn measure a tree on Cuddeback’s newly purchased land. Cuddeback asked the two for advice that can be incorporated into a resource management plan for the new property.